

Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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SURINAME

Summary

Cuba is bent on exploiting the situation in Suriname to promote the emergence of a pro-Cuban, leftist, anti-US government there. We believe Havana will keep a low profile to avoid triggering Dutch or US intervention, but, if asked, will provide modest assistance aimed at consolidating Army Commander Bouterse's grip on power. Havana eventually may seek to enthrone a more cooperative leader, however, if the politically unsophisticated and erratic Bouterse proves unreliable or ineffective.

While the Castro regime presently has no major political or economic stake in preserving the dictatorship of Army Commander Daysi Bouterse in Suriname, the Cubans see an opportunity there to promote the emergence of a pro-Cuban, leftist government hostile to the US in much the same fashion as the governments in Grenada and Nicaragua. We believe, however, that Havana is wary of provoking intervention by the US or the Dutch, and of alarming both Brazil and Venezuela, and therefore

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is likely to continue to concentrate on low profile assistance to Bouterse. If Bouterse shows signs of losing his grip, Havana may decide that his lack of political sophistication renders him expendable and may try to engineer a switch to a political figure of more acceptable international reputation--such as Foreign Minister Naarendorp.

The Cubans apparently have no illusions about Bouterse's ideological credentials and probably see him as little more than an exploitable--albeit politically inept--opportunist. They have been careful to make no major investment of Cuban political prestige or economic/military resources in helping him consolidate his rule. Therefore, while Bouterse's replacement by a centrist or rightist government would be a disappointment in terms of a lost opportunity, it would involve no other real cost for the Cubans.

Castro probably considers the arbitrary executions of Bouterse's opposition early last month as a major gaffe for an emerging political leader who enjoys no popular support. The Cuban ambassador in Paramaribo, an experienced intelligence officer, almost certainly has informed Havana of the wave of popular revulsion that followed the executions. The ambassador's reporting presumably has given Castro little reason to be optimistic either about Bouterse's future or about prospects for improving Cuba's popular image in Suriname over the short term.

We believe there is little chance that Havana will exercise the option of sending troops to bolster Bouterse's position if events in Suriname continue as at present. Such blatant interference to prop up an unpopular dictator would presumably be rejected by Castro as counterproductive--a move certain to trigger US or Dutch intervention and a military confrontation that would embarrass Havana. Concern has been high in Havana for over a year that Washington is spoiling for a fight, perhaps with Cuba itself, and, in our estimation, the Cuban leadership, with persistent doubts as to Bouterse's revolutionary bona fides, does not want to risk a military encounter with the US for such a modest return.

Havana could simply ignore Bouterse's predicament, arguing that any major Cuban investment in the future of an ideologically questionable dictator, especially one with a bad reputation both at home and abroad, is not justified. We believe, however, that this is unlikely. Havana decided to help Bouterse some time ago and, after establishing a diplomatic mission in Paramaribo and developing close personal ties to him, the Cubans are not about to write him off. Castro has always favored an activist foreign policy and likes to take advantage of opportunities as they

occur. All signs indicate that he sees much to exploit in the Suriname situation.

The option that appears to hold the most promise for Havana would call for a continuation of the present low key approach. We believe Castro will offer the usual types of low-risk help that has bolstered Cuba's image elsewhere--doctors, nurses, medical technicians, teachers, construction workers, agricultural and livestock experts, and the like. Castro will probably want to keep the Cuban presence small to avoid sparking frictions in a population that already has demonstrated hostility toward Cubans. Should Bouterse ask for it, Castro would probably send a modest contingent--no more than 100--of political and military advisers and bodyguards. The latter would come from the Cuban Interior Ministry's Special Troops--Castro's Green Berets. Teams of Special Troops personnel, serving in mufti as well as in uniform, have been provided over the years to many chiefs-of-state, including Angola's Agostinho Neto in the late 1970s, Chile's Salvador Allende in the early 1970s, and, [redacted] to Grenada's Maurice Bishop.

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With Special Troops guaranteeing Bouterse's personal security, we believe Havana would urge him to consolidate his position by strengthening the People's Militia as a domestic security force personally loyal to him, making effective use of the regime's control of the media, and developing grass roots political support through the creation of mass organizations for the country's workers, farmers, youth, and women. As it has done in other countries, Havana would provide experienced advisers to guide him in all of these tasks. [redacted]

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It is safe to expect the Cubans to try to undermine US influence in Suriname at every opportunity. This will be done on both an individual basis, with approaches to leaders within and outside the government, and a mass basis, with the population in general. Havana, using local allies, is likely to begin distributing anti-US propaganda materials when the political climate is deemed appropriate. Measures to discredit US diplomats may be undertaken as a means of reducing or eliminating the official US presence.

Should Havana's cultivation of Bouterse eventually fail to pay off, or if, after a substantial Cuban investment has been made in Suriname, Bouterse continues to alienate important sectors at home and abroad, the Castro regime would not hesitate to attempt to effect a transition to a new leader--perhaps Foreign Minister Naarendorp--who might be more cooperative.

There are several precedents for such a shift in allegiance by Havana, and Bouterse, already wary, apparently knows there are limits to Havana's commitment.



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